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ABSTRACT

Development of a common credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) system for the post-16 learner has been proposed in Great Britain. The rationale for this system is to increase the participation and achievement of learners over age 16, to improve access to learning opportunities, and to facilitate the development of core knowledge and skills. The post-16 CAT framework should use the open system, in which users adopt a set of standards on a voluntary basis because it offers mutual benefits. Work on the development of a post-16 credit framework as an open system has established definitions and specifications of outcomes and units, a methodology for credit valuation of units, and an initial proposal about the number of levels that would be required. The qualifications within this framework would be based upon groups of outcomes, to be described as units. Credits are awarded for successful achievement of a set of outcomes combined into a unit, regardless of the actual time involved or the mode of learning. Units at the same level can be given different credit values dependent upon the extent of achievement they require, thus removing the necessity for an artificial and possibly damaging requirement for units to be of the same size. The post-16 CAT framework could be used as the basis of a range of developments in curriculum and qualifications. The Further Education Unit has identified key criteria to be met by a post-16 CAT framework. The proposed framework needs to be evaluated against these criteria. (YLB)

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FOREWORD

This paper:

i) describes the benefits which could be gained by producing a post-16 credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) framework, which encompassed all levels and types of qualification; from Key Stage 4 of the National Curriculum through to the HE masters/professional qualifications;

ii) introduces the concept of 'an open system' and the potential this has for allowing the system to grow from the bottom up, in a voluntary manner over time;

iii) argues the case for qualifications within this framework to be based upon coherent collections of outcomes, to be described as 'units';

iv) describes the mechanism by which units at the same level can be given different credit values dependent upon the extent of achievement they require, thus removing the necessity for an artificial and possibly damaging requirement for units to be of the same 'size';

v) describes the general features that such units must possess.

The benefits of a fully developed framework require more examination of:

- *the allocation of units to levels (dependent upon the level of achievement required);*
- *the categorisation of units into types (dependent upon the type of achievement required).*

However, the work we have undertaken so far (or synthesised - since we are fully aware of how much thought and even action has gone on elsewhere) has created so much interest and debate that we decided that a discussion paper at this time would be valuable.

There seemed to me to be two equal but opposite risks:

- *The reward to be gained is so great that enthusiasts may build too many hopes and schemes on what turn out to be faulty foundations.*
- *Existing preconceptions, ideologies and vested interests may cause mundane, technical or terminological problems to be much exaggerated.*

We invite you to discuss with us the conceptual underpinning and/or the practical utility of these ideas, and to let us know of related work which we could learn from or support.

Geoff Stanton
Chief Officer
Further Education Unit

A BASIS FOR CREDIT?

Developing a post-16 credit accumulation and transfer framework

A Paper for Discussion

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INTRODUCTION

> 'We would advocate the eventual creation of a unit-based system which would allow individuals to transfer between routes during the 16-19 period as well as after it, would allow units to be combined in such a way as to provide general, specialist, academic and vocational programmes (or combinations of these of equal worth) and would, in general, permit the variety of approaches to learning which we advocated earlier as being required if attainment and participation are to be maximised'.

FEU submission to the House of Commons Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts, March 1991

This paper is aimed at policy makers, planners and managers in institutions and local, regional and national organisations. Because it explores an approach which could be introduced gradually from the bottom up it will also be of interest to practitioners responsible for provision for all post-16 learners. The work described here is part of a long-term FEU agenda to help promote coherence and flexibility in both qualifications and learning programmes post-16. This means examining the possibilities of creating a common system within which all types of qualifications can exist and develop, and a common curriculum framework within which different kinds of learning programme can be designed and implemented.

This paper describes continuing work (RP642) undertaken by FEU as part of an investigation of issues involved in the development of a common CAT system for the post-16 sector. If achieved, such a system would increase the opportunities for learners to undertake programmes which are made up of subjects and vocational disciplines spanning the existing academic, vocational and prevocational qualifications. FEU believes that learning programmes should, in general, embody greater choice, flexibility, relevance and breadth, and learners should receive public accreditation for their achievements. This links with the government's belief that young people should be encouraged to:

> 'choose a blend of qualifications to suit their individual needs and talents.... After 16 they should have a free choice between A level, AS qualifications, NVQs and combinations of them'.

Education and Training for the 21st Century 1991

RATIONALE FOR A POST-16 CAT FRAMEWORK

The underlying rationale is:

- to increase the participation and achievement of post-16 learners;
- to improve access to learning opportunities and enhance possibilities for progression in education and training;
- to provide for greater choice and give learners a greater say in what, when and how they learn;
- to encourage learners to undertake broader learning programmes whether they are in employment, preparing for employment, pre-paring for HE or developing basic skills;
- to facilitate the development of a core of knowledge and skills;
- to develop new study combinations which are more relevant to an innovation culture and which render obsolete divisions and terminology such as academic/vocational, practical/theoretical, creative/technical, Arts/Humanities/Science;
- to allow specialised and customised education and training.

The project arose from a series of reports and consultative papers over the past 18 months propos-ing a more unified framework for qualifications post-16. They include *16-19 The Way Forward* (Secondary Heads Association); *A British Baccalaureate* (Institute of Public Policy Research); *Beyond GCSE* (The Royal Society); *Credit Transfer and the future of Further Education* (UDACE) and *A Framework for Growth* (Association of Principals of Sixth Form Colleges). Amongst other bodies including the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), the Trades Union Congress (TUC), the Association for Science Education (ASE), National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE); the Headmasters' Conference (HMC) and the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals (CVCP), there has been a developing consensus about the need for a framework which in general terms:

- is unified and contains both the academic and vocational programmes;
- is based on 'units' expressed in terms of outcomes;
- enables 'credit' to be accumulated and (where appropriate) transferred;
- facilitates the development of a common core of knowledge and skills in all learning programmes, especially in relation to 16-19 year olds.

FEU too, in its evidence to the House of Commons Select Committee (above) and in the response to the Ordinary and Advanced Diploma proposals (October 1991), recommended a way forward based on units as a means of achieving flexibility and simplicity, and recognising positive achievement of different kinds, rigorously, without requiring significant numbers to 'fail'.

The proposals are not ends in themselves and should be seen in the context of developing the most effective ways to increase participation and attainment of all learners post-16. They also aim to enable the development of a curriculum relevant to both individual and wider economic and social interests in the context of an increasingly complex and rapidly changing world.

A BASIS FOR CREDIT - THE APPROACH IN OUTLINE

- Learning programmes and qualifications should be based on clear statements of what someone is expected to know, understand and do ('Outcomes').
- A coherent group of Outcomes is called a 'Unit'.
- The size of the Unit may need to vary, depending on the internal structure and logic of different subjects or vocational sectors.
- It is possible to relate Units one to another in terms of extent of achievement, by giving each a 'credit value'.
- The credit value of a Unit of Outcomes, at a given level, is determined by the time, on average, it will take the learner to achieve the Outcomes in question. If this is 30 hours the credit value is given as one, if 90 hours the credit value is three, etc.
- *The link to the 'hours of learning' is purely for the purpose of allocating credit value;* there is nothing to stop fast learners achieving the Unit more quickly while others may need to take longer. It is recognised that Outcomes can be achieved through prior achievement based on learning in the workplace and community.

A qualification or learning programme *could* consist of a single Unit, if to break it down further would lead to artificiality or incoherence. However this situation is likely to be unusual, and in general a qualification which is made up of a larger number of Units will give flexibility and better feedback to the learner.

In this approach *how* individuals achieve a Unit is not relevant to the framework and will be a matter for institutions, designers of open learning packages, providers of the Accreditation/Assessment of Prior Achievement (APA) and others.

Units will need to relate to each other in *level* of achievement and *type* of achievement. Forthcoming FEU papers will address these issues more fully.

POST-16 CAT FRAMEWORK - AN OPEN SYSTEM

The existing qualifications systems in the UK, GCE AS/A Level, GCSE, National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), Business and Technician Education Council (BTEC), City and Guilds of London Institute (CGLI), RSA Examinations Board, Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) CATs, Open University (OU), Scottish Vocational Education Council (SCOTVEC), etc. are closed systems. While there is some potential for credit accumulation, opportunities for credit transfer are limited. They have logical internal relationships within their own system but, despite considerable curriculum overlap, there is no universally agreed way of interfacing with the other systems including degrees in higher education.

A lay person's guide to the UNIX computer system defines an open system as:

'a logical system which provides the means of interfacing with other operating systems'.

A post-16 CAT framework should use the *open system* as a model. An open system is one where users adopt, or subscribe to, a set of standards or rules on a voluntary basis because it offers mutual benefits. It does not involve imposition and is potentially universal.

Examples of this are the electronics industry converging on VHS cassettes; the Unix system for computers; a standard railway gauge and the QWERTY keyboard for the typewriter. None of these systems was imposed - they were adopted by different and competing businesses/operators because they offered benefits to their mutual advantage.

A college could subscribe to the system in two ways; firstly by adopting the framework definitions and system of credit valuation as a way of mapping, comparing and planning its own curriculum offer, and secondly by negotiating agreements with other institutions, HE and employers based on the framework. And so the post-16 CAT framework could emerge from the grass roots into an open national system.

The approach proposed here would result in an open system. It is not a new set of qualifications or awards. It is a way of relating existing qualifications (or parts of them) to each other as well as offering enormous potential for creating new Units, new qualifications, new awards and new progression routes.

A CAT framework based on this approach could, in addition to giving a credit value to qualifications, ascribe credit value to learning programmes not associated with a qualification, provided the programme was described in terms of Outcomes and made up of Units at a specific level.

A fully developed post-16 CAT framework would permit mapping of existing post-16 qualifications and learning programmes onto a common grid both locally and nationally. It might also logically include units from Key Stage 4 of the National Curriculum. It would provide a development platform on which to build new curricula and qualifications and could be used to take UK qualifications and awards away from the current divisions and confusion, and towards greater rationality and coherence.

A BASIS FOR CREDIT - FOUNDATIONS OF THE FRAMEWORK

FEU work on the development of a post-16 credit framework as an open system has so far established:

- a definition and specification of Outcomes;
- a definition and specification of Units;
- a methodology for credit valuation of Units;
- an initial proposal about the number of levels which would be required.

Once it becomes possible to determine credit value and level, it will also be possible to ascribe to all qualifications and their component Units, as well as learning programmes, a credit value at a specific level.

For example :

Unit A = 3 Credits Level 4
Unit B = 1 Credit Level 2
Unit C = 2 Credits Level 1

The definitions of Outcomes, Units, Credits and Levels are interdependent and represent the foundations of the framework.

Outcomes

Outcome statements describe what a learner can be expected to know, understand and do in order to achieve credit.

Outcomes may be specified in ways which respect differing curriculum practice, forms of learning and types of assessment.

Examples of statements are:

- elements of competence (NVQs)
- assessment objectives (A level)
- learning objectives (BTEC)
- learning outcome statements (Liverpool Polytechnic)
- statements of attainment (National Curriculum)
- learning outcome statements (National Open College Network)
- statements of attainment (GNVQ)
- statements of attainment (GCSE)

Units

A Unit is a coherent and explicit set of Outcomes, the achievement of which gains the learner a defined number of Credits at a specified level. Units will differ in size and carry different credit values.

The Unit specification consists of:

- title
- level
- credit value
- outcome statements
- assessment criteria
- awarding body

The specification may also include guidance on :

- recommended Unit combinations
- recommended prior study/experience
- outline programme/syllabus
- grading criteria
- teaching and learning strategies
- guidance on APL
- destinations and awards

Credits

Credits are the currency of the system. A Credit is a medium of exchange. It is used to value Units of Outcomes which may vary in size and complexity. Credits are awarded on the successful achievement of a set of clearly-defined Outcomes combined into a Unit *regardless of the actual time involved or the mode of learning.*

A credit value is established by agreeing the notional amount of time (including teacher contact and independent study) required, on average, for a learner to achieve the defined Outcomes of a Unit at a specified level. This total number of notional hours is divided by a given number, say 30, to establish the credit value for a Unit or programme - one credit is the value given to the Outcomes achieved through 30 notional hours of learning activity.

$$\frac{\text{notional learning time}}{30} = \text{number of Credits}$$

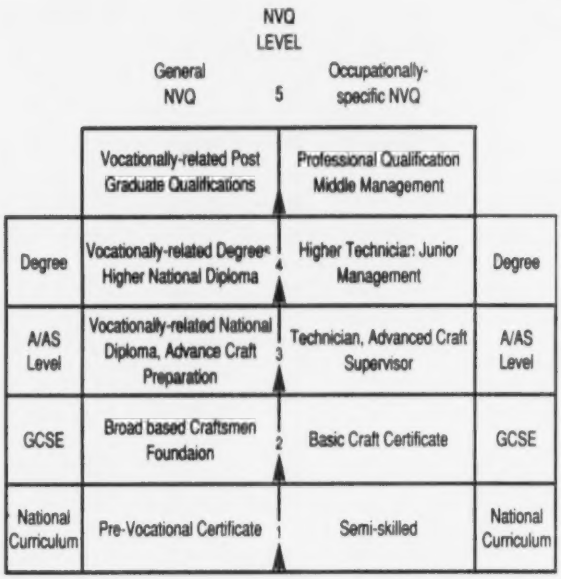
The figure of 30 notional hours is proposed because it approximates to one hour of learning activity (teacher time + independent study) per week per year in the schools, FE and HE sectors. Alternatives are possible - see question 5 in 'Responding to the framework' (p .8).

Once the credit value of a Unit is fixed the mode of learning or the actual amount of time the individual learner spends in achieving the Outcomes is not relevant to the number of Credits awarded.

Credits may not be used to grade different attainment by individual students. All or none of the Credit is awarded for each Unit.

Levels

Credits are achieved at a number of levels ranging from basic education to postgraduate degrees/NCVQ Level 5. Levels might be derived from, and, extend the model of broad equivalence used in the White Paper *Education and Training in the 21st Century*. These are:



Higher Education (HE) already has extensive CAT arrangements. There is a national system in the polytechnic sector and universities are committed to rapid development along similar lines. The National Open College Network has established its own national CAT arrangements at four levels from basic education to degree entry. The development of vocational and prevocational courses at Key Stage 4 in the National Curriculum and student progression and curriculum continuity from 14 onwards would be facilitated by a CAT framework

NCVQ have established a framework for vocational qualifications at five levels. The White Paper *Education and Training for the 21st Century* proposes broad equivalences between academic and vocational qualification based on NVQ Levels. The National Open College Federation has also established a framework at four levels which cover a broad range of learning. Recent work by the Unit for the Development of Adult Continuing Education (UDACE) and NCVQ has indicated the potential for convergence in a number of respects. FEU recognises that the definition and number of levels represent a key area of further work which would involve a consensus about broad equivalence, recognition and transferability amongst the major potential users of the framework.

A fully developed framework would allow all post-16 qualifications and learning programmes to be mapped onto a single grid. This would also open up new possibilities in terms of choice and combinations. It would be necessary for the framework to possess the breadth to include everything between the most theoretical demands of academic programmes and the most practical demands of NVQs on the horizontal axis and between basic education and HE Masters degrees/professional qualifications on the vertical. The position of National Curriculum levels on the vertical axis also needs to be considered.

FEU recognises the need for extensive consultation and development of a consensus amongst users of the framework at a local and national level before :

- the amount of notional time associated with different qualifications is established;
- the definition and number of levels are fixed.

ILLUSTRATION OF CREDIT VALUATION

Whatever the size of a Unit, it can be expressed in terms of Credits at a specific levels.

QUALIFICATION OR UNIT	NORMAL HOURS (Illustrative)	CREDIT VALUE	FRAMEWORK LEVEL (Illustrative)
NVQ LEVEL 1			
QUALIFICATION	240	8	1
NVQ LEVEL 2			
UNIT			
Example 1	30	1	2
Example 2	60	2	2
GCSE (at			
appropriate level)	300	10	2
BTEC			
NATIONAL			
UNIT	90	3	3
GNVQ LEVEL 3	900	30	3
1 x A LEVEL	480	16	3
1 x AS LEVEL	240	8	3
ACCESS TO HE	600	20	3
CERTIFICATE			
HE CERTIFICATE	900	30	4
HE DIPLOMA	1800	60	5
HE DEGREE	2700	90	6
HE MASTERS	900	30	7

NOTE

The notional hours and levels above are used *only for illustrative purposes*. They are an indication of how a fully developed framework could span the full range of post-16 qualifications and curricula, and express credit value in a common form for both qualifications and parts of qualifications.

NEW CURRICULUM AND QUALIFICATIONS

For the purposes of curriculum planning, development of new qualifications and establishing new progression routes between FE and HE and FE and employment, further work is required to categorise Units according to the nature or curriculum area of the Outcomes. It would also involve recommendations on how Units should be combined to maintain coherence and credibility.

There are further questions about establishing a national bank of Units, sharing Units and the appropriate regulatory systems. FEU will be undertaking work in these areas alongside the developments associated with the key components of the post-16 CAT framework.

A BASIS FOR CREDIT? - A SUMMARY

FEU is proposing a framework which is *outcome-led, unitised and credit-based*. It is particularly important to emphasise that :

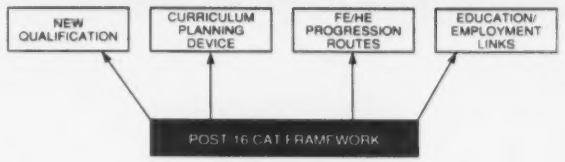
- achievement of a set of explicit Outcomes specified within a Unit, not the amount of time spent or the mode of study, is the basis for credit;
- Units and learning programmes can be of different sizes, shapes and volume, and therefore they may attract different credit values;
- integrated group awards are not discouraged or ruled out;
- incoherent and arbitrary combinations of Units can be discouraged;
- Credits are awarded at a number of levels. These should range from the National Curriculum/basic education to postgraduate degrees/professional qualifications;
- awards and qualifications could be made up of Units at different levels.

The framework that is envisaged needs to be open and link up academic, general and vocational qualifications. It could be the basis for new qualifications and awards such as GNVQs, reformed AS/A levels and ordinary and advanced diplomas.

In this approach *Credits are educational currency*. They are a medium of exchange for learning which is different in kind, but equal in value. It will allow different curriculum areas to be valued on the same basis and be combined in rational and coherent ways. It can open up development of new curriculum areas appropriate to a changing world.

A crucial aspect of the proposal is that the system of credit used to measure the quantities of learning achieved is divorced from the system of Units (of assessment.) It is because of this that a national framework can be established which spans the entire post-16 curriculum. It can be subscribed to by national bodies, colleges, HE and employers - it does not need to be imposed.

HOW THE POST-16 CAT FRAMEWORK COULD BE USED



A development platform for post-16 curriculum and qualifications development

A post-16 CAT framework would establish a *platform* for a range of developments in relation to curriculum and qualifications. It would offer :

Learners

- greater opportunity to negotiate and plan learning programmes appropriate to their needs, interests and preferred mode of learning;
- increased choice and opportunities for more varied curriculum combinations;
- opportunities to enter and exit education and training according to needs and circumstances and retain credit earned to date;
- opportunities for changes in direction without loss of credit and with interim certification.

Institutions

- a means to map, review, and plan curriculum offers both internally and in collaboration with other providers;
- a standard definition of credit and a means of determining it in relation to a range of curricula and qualifications for 16-19 year olds and adults;
- a basis for establishing modular delivery structures which would enable institutions to provide flexibility, choice and breadth cost effectively;
- a basis for high quality progression routes into education and training of all kinds.

The broader field

- a common framework for examination and validation bodies supporting the development of both credit accumulation and credit transfer across the divided qualifications system;
- a new basis for the development of GNVQs, Ordinary and Advanced Diplomas and a National Record of Achievement.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

The work of this project has already begun to be used in a number of contexts including a major project in five colleges in Wales managed by the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC) and funded by the Training Enterprise and Education Division of the Employment Department (TEED). London Together, which involves the University of London, several London Polytechnics, London LEAs, TECS and business organisations has shown interest in the approach and drawn attention to its potential for improving co-operation between sectors and raising participation in education and training across the Capital. Islington LEA is investigating the uses of this approach in the development of a unified 16+ curriculum across its institutions. It has attracted considerable interest in the post-16 sector and elsewhere, in advance of any widespread formal dissemination. There has also been interest from the schools sector, HE and Training and Enterprise Councils (TECS).

FEU will be conducting a number of developmental projects in FE colleges but is also interested to learn of examples where institutions/LEAs/TECS/regional bodies are taking up the approach and making use of it for themselves.

FEU will be undertaking work which explores how the approach could be used to develop local/regional curriculum offers with progression to HE and employer consortia. Work is also underway to investigate how the framework could be used as a basis for a national system of ordinary and advanced diplomas as well as other awards giving access to employment, FE and HE. There will also be investigation of how the framework can be integrated with the emerging CATS system in the new HE sector.

Further developments will have to involve:

- determining levels within the framework;
- mechanisms for accreditation and quality assurance;
- determining the scope and extent of any national organisation to regulate and develop the framework;
- methods of categorising units according to types of outcome achieved.

CRITERIA FOR A POST-16 CAT FRAMEWORK

FEU has identified key criteria which a post-16 framework would have to meet. The framework should:

- span all provision and qualifications post-16 (possibly post-14) - academic, vocational and pre-vocational and include higher education;
- create a credit system which unifies existing qualifications without imposing a uniform curriculum;
- develop over a fixed period of time while being based to begin with on existing structures and qualifications;
- encourage flexibility and choice for learners;
- encourage breadth in the design of learning programmes and qualifications;
- develop links between existing awards and qualifications such as AS/A levels, GCSEs, NVQs, GNVQs, BTEC, RSA, C&G, Open College Networks and degrees;
- facilitate both the accumulation and transfer of credit;
- express credit in a such a way that different routes and subject areas are accorded parity in terms of their value within the framework;
- facilitate provision of a common core in terms of skills, knowledge and understanding;
- be simple to operate and understand.

The framework implied here needs to be evaluated against these exacting criteria as would any variants of, or alternatives to it. The purpose of the following questions is to generate discussion and comment and test the extent to which the key criteria are met by these proposals.

RESPONDING TO THE FRAMEWORK

FEU would also like the post-16 CAT framework proposals to be analysed and discussed by national bodies and other organisations. Responses are invited to the suggestions made in this paper and should in particular address the following :

1 To what extent is there a need for a national credit framework as outlined here ?

2 Are there significant differences about the world of 14-19 education that make a CAT framework more difficult to establish than in higher education or adult education where CAT framework have been developing rapidly? If so what are they?

3 Does the approach to credit valuation outlined here offer a realistic basis for establishing a common currency ? If not what alternatives could be suggested?

4 Is 'Credit' the best term to use for the unit of exchange ? What term could be suggested as an alternative ?

5 Is 30 hours the best amount of notional time on which to base credit valuation ? What alternative figure could be used ?

6 Does the framework offer a way of establishing a system of ordinary and advanced level diplomas which could be the basis for entry into HE and employment?

7 In what ways could this approach be used by colleges and other institutions in order to support curriculum planning, management and delivery?

8 What kind of organisation or network at a national level would be most appropriate in order to develop and regulate a CAT framework for the post-16 sector ?

Please address responses to these questions and other issues arising from this bulletin to Tony Tait, FEU, Spring Gardens, Citadel Place, London SE11 5EH.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FEU thanks the following people for their contributions to the work associated with this project:

Jim Bennett (FEU); Adrian Carey (Modular Information Network/Surrey TVEI); Sheila Clarke (Scottish FEU/SCOTVEC Consultant); David Davies (WJEC); Ken Gadd (NCC/Yeovil College); Maureen Hanley (Wirral Metropolitan College); Caroline Mager (UDACE); Andrew Morris (Islington Sixth Form Centre/Post-16 Education Centre, Institute of Education); Bob Rainbow (Wessex Project); David Robertson (Liverpool Polytechnic); Tony Tait (FEU); Richard White (Bradford LEA); Peter Wilson, (Leicestershire LEA Open College Network).

FEU also acknowledges the contributions of CNAA, NCVQ, TEED, UDACE, and other national organisations carrying out developmental work related to credit accumulation and credit transfer post 16.

Many practitioners from FE, HE, AE and the schools sectors have also made a significant contributions and in particular the National Open College Networks and Liverpool Polytechnic are acknowledged for their work on modularisation and credits.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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